

Who Will Save Social Security and Medicare?

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Theme: [Poverty & Social Inequality](#)

Before Social Security and Medicare existed, the elderly were either completely dependent on their children or were left to beg in the streets. These programs thus remain sacred to the vast majority of Americans. They allow the elderly dignity and independence instead of poverty and insecurity.

Attacking these programs has always been political suicide for the assailant; not even the smoothest talking politician would squirm into an aggressive stance.

But now the gloves are off. Obama and the Democrats are aligning with Republicans to strike the first major blows against Social Security and Medicare. This long hidden agenda is finally in full view of the public. The decades-long political agreement to save these programs is dead, and the foundation of American politics is shifting beneath everyone's feet.

The New York Times [reports](#):

“President Obama next week will take the political risk of formally proposing cuts to Social Security and Medicare in his annual budget...”

Many liberals are scratching their heads in astonishment, asking “How could this happen?”

The truth is that every liberal and labor leader knew this was in the works for years; they just kept their mouths shut in the hope that Obama could successfully push the blame entirely on the Republicans.

Throughout the summer of 2011 Obama worked with Republicans in the first attempt at a ‘Grand Bargain’ that included cuts to Social Security and Medicare. The Washington Post published an article entitled “[Obama’s Evolution](#)” about that summer:

“...the major elements of a [Grand] bargain seemed to be falling into place: \$1.2 trillion in [national programs] agency cuts, [smaller cost-of-living increases](#) [cuts] for Social Security recipients [cuts by dollar inflation], nearly \$250 billion in Medicare savings [cuts] achieved in part by raising the eligibility age [of Medicare]. And \$800 billion in new taxes.”

Labor and liberal leaders kept quiet about this so they could push their members to vote for Obama in 2012. They also kept quite in the fall of 2011 when [Obama released his budget proposal](#) that included hundreds of billions of dollars worth of cuts to Medicare and Medicaid.

But hiding the most recent betrayal was next to impossible, and every liberal group is now suddenly “shocked” to see Obama officially and publicly on record to pursue the cuts.

The most craven of the liberal groups will continue to spew rotten rhetoric that only blames Republicans for the cuts while making excuses for Obama's behavior, claiming that he merely buckled under intense Republican pressure and felt the need to "compromise."

But it's all nonsense. No working person who votes Republican wants to cut Medicare and Social Security. Obama could have shattered the Republican Party at its kneecaps by broadly exposing their plans to cut Social Security and Medicare. Instead he insisted on co-leading the attack.

These cuts have nothing to do with Obama's courage or backbone. It's a matter of political and economic ideology, and the policy that flows from it.

To reverse this policy one cannot make excuses for the president or ignore his "treacherous" behavior. A criminal offensive requires a powerful counterattack. And although labor and liberal groups are reluctant to attack "their" president, the members of these groups share a different perspective.

In an attempt to connect with the rank and file, the president of the AFL-CIO, Richard Trumka, [said of Obama's Social Security cuts](#):

"These cuts are bad policy. And the only way we're going to stop them is if President Obama and all members of Congress hear that we're not going to tolerate them. Sign our petition to the president NOW."

The trouble is that petitions are not capable of stopping the years-in-the-making bi-partisan attack. Trumka knows this. He is thus faking opposition to a policy that he's partially responsible for, since his miseducating of the AFL-CIO membership led to an ignorance that Obama exploited — union members couldn't mobilize against something they didn't know was happening.

But now the secret is exposed, and working people will expect the leaders of their organizations to wage a serious fight against these policies.

Those in the labor movement interested in organizing against this anti-worker offensive should consider actively building the coming August 24 demonstration called by the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) and The King Center for Washington, D.C. where they are planning to place the demand for jobs to end poverty squarely on the Obama government. Once working people are mobilized to fight independently for their own interests, it will be far easier to add demands around Social Security and Medicare to the list, since working people overwhelmingly support these programs.

The AFL-CIO has endorsed this demonstration. Now they will have to seriously mobilize for it.

If we don't fight back now, then when?

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Notes

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